

OFFICER OF THE WATCH

On watch for long leagues. On watch. And the whip
of leagues scanning nothing. The Darkener, my ship,
precedes the log that spins to say
a leviathan-whisper. Dread is stowaway
in the ship's belly -- and in the men.

Jonah's my jest, as antennae dip
at masthead of my age. "All's well" wears thin
as the Great Scythe nears. Delicate statics twist
seaserpent trails: new orders, objectives,
as time curls to each trestle wrist.
What has God classified? Do we dispense
with orders affirmed by statistics and sense?
Isaiah's, Akhanaton's dream of one world
is a cancelled code. When can I sleep?
Here are weights. O are the books for the deep?

We are drilled in security: "If foes close in,
be prepared to abandon." The secure ship
heaves steadily on, as the hour binds men,
poor sticks of men, helpless fasces of power.

Then, a-flower
on incoming distance, two flares. Distress.
Sound alarm. Zig-zag.
Fate has candles lit:
so, shadow-play again. We're in for it.

I wonder who's at helm, under the changed condition.
My relief comes. I tell the knowable past
tersely -- knowing a glib superstition
tips my tongue. For at last
all has come to come-what-may.
What does it matter what I say?
Leviathan will have his way.

Sam Bradley